DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 765 PS 027 661

TITLE	Childcare and Education for Children between the Ages of Two and Seven in the Netherlands. Position Paper.
INSTITUTION	Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague (Netherlands).; Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, The Hague (Netherlands).
PUB DATE	1998-04-00
NOTE	36p.; Paper presented at the European Policy Conference on Early Childhood Education (Amsterdam, Netherlands, April 23-24, 1998).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Day Care; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; Inservice Education; Position Papers; Public Policy; *Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In the Netherlands, there is growing interest in the day care and education of young children, stemming from the increase in culturally different, multilingual pupils in recent years and the understanding that the first 2 years of primary education form the basis for a successful school career. This position paper of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands describes the current provisions for child care and education of children ages 4 and 5. Chapter 1 discusses the vision, basic assumptions, and policy relating to the preschool period and to primary education. Chapter 2 presents a discussion of the structure of preschool provisions and of primary education. Two attachments to this chapter provide surveys of the quantitative data of several pupils, of the costs, and of personnel working in child care and education. Chapter 3 deals with education, inservice training, and counseling. Chapter 4 considers the relationship and coordination of preschool policy between the Ministries of Health, Welfare and Sport and the educational policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This chapter concludes with several policy measures taken to eliminate bottlenecks in the provision of preschool and the first 2 years of primary education. (KB)

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Childcare and education for children between the ages of two and seven in The Netherlands

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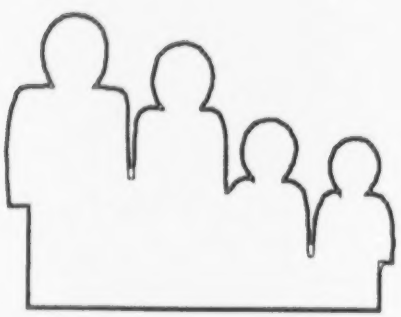

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Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschappen

Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport

Position Paper

the Netherlands

'Childcare and Education for Children between the ages of two and seven in The Netherlands'

Zoetermeer/Rijswijk, April 1998

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

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Introduction

There is growing interest in the day care and education of young children. This stems partly from the rise in numbers of culturally different, multilingual pupils in recent years. Another factor is the understanding that the first two years of Primary education (infant department) form the basis for a successful school career.

When the formative years go smoothly, parents and children gain a solid basis to build on later. Parents have the initial responsibility for raising their children. Not all parents can find sufficient support in their social environments for the upbringing and development of their children. It is therefore important to support parents in raising their children and to encourage a stimulating social environment for children.

The childcare policy is fully decentralized to local governments. The policy is to promote child childcare during the pre-school period for children up to the age of four as well as during the school period. Local governments also facilitate play-groups. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is developing a specific policy for the education of young children.
The child day-care policy is designed to give parents an opportunity to combine paid employment and parental duties and to encourage women to enter the labour market. In particular, the educational policy seeks to combat and prevent (young) children from getting behind. It seeks to strengthen and improve the quality of education, reducing the need for referrals to special education.

The purpose of this position paper is to describe the current state of affairs in the Netherlands, concerning the childcare provision and education for young children (age 4 and 5 years).

Chapter 1 discusses the vision, basic assumptions and policy relating to the pre-school period and to Primary education. Then, in chapter 2, there is a discussion about the structure of pre-school provisions and of Primary education. Enclosures 1 and 2 provide surveys of the quantitative data of several pupils, of the costs and of personnel working in childcare and education. The chapter concludes with a description of the state of affairs of childcare and education for children between the ages of two and seven years.

Chapter 3 deals with education, in-service training and counselling. Finally, in chapter 4, the relationship and coordination of pre-school period policy between the ministries of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) and the educational policy of the ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCenW) is mentioned. This chapter concludes with several policy measures taken to do away with bottlenecks in the pre-school provisions and "infant department".

Chapter 1
Vision, basic assumptions and policy, pre-school period and Primary education

1.1
The Pre-school Period

To provide parents with better opportunities for combining paid employment and parenthood the national government has set up an incentive policy for childcare. This is full day care, half-daycare (age 0-4), extra-curricular care and childminders (hostparents). This incentive-policy started in 1990 and ended January 1st 1996, when the childcare policy was fully decentralized to local governments. In the incentive period the number of places in childcare increased to 70,000 (including the afther-school day-care). The local governments now have the responsibility for the planning and financing of childcare. Though in 1997 an incentive programme started for afther-school childcare. Apart from this there are playgroups (age 2-4) as part of the local youth welfare policy. This also is the responsibility of the local governments.

A programme emphasizing pedagogic quality in childcare provision is being set up. It focuses on inspirational pedagogic ideas developed abroad. There is plenty of interest in improving the quality and structure of support available in playgroups and out-of-school activities aimed at specific target groups such as ethnic minority. There are discussions taking place in playgroups about the possibility or desirability of using special programmes to prepare children more directly for education. More generally, ways of improving the links between these provisions and the school are being considered.

Several playgroups and day nurseries adopt special approaches, such as intercultural day care, multilingual day care, extra attention for creativity or for following the seasons. Others are more specifically orientated towards the ideas of Freinet, Montessori or Steiner.

There are two main starting points in the upbringing-support programme which the ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) carries out in conjunction with other government authorities and welfare agencies.

They define the basic requirements for providing adequate upbringing support:

1. Family support should aim to strengthen the potential and active involvement of educators and children, instead of making them dependent on provisions and help;
2. Parenting support should relate to the culture and specific demands of parents.

There is an assumption that various social frameworks, family, school and the wider social environment, have an effect on the course of attending school. Family influences are especially important during the early and pre-school phase. Migrant parents (especially mothers) receive assistance in raising their children in the Netherlands. This is not because the parents are incapable of doing so. The assistance is in the form of upbringing support that fits in with the capacities of the parents. Young, ethnic minority children receive preparation for attending school in the Netherlands through family-directed programmes such as 'Instapje', 'Opstapje', 'Opstap' and 'Overstap' (Step In, Step On, Step Over)[1]. The goal is to encourage language skills and cognitive development. The Overstap programme is a variation on the Israeli Hippy project.

Besides supporting the 'Opstap' programme, there is extensive, differentiated family support available from the basic and specialized provisions. In some 15 regions the Home-Start programme is implemented, which aims family-support by volunteers. Parents who are dependent on such support find that it is fragmented, sometimes hard to identify and not sufficiently in tune with the demands and needs of parents. Moreover, the available support does not (adequately) reach some parents. Much attention is therefore spent on coordinating the available support, making it more easily identifiable and accessible.

1.2
Primary education

In the discussion concerning young children's education, there are various theories pertaining to the development of children. Elements of these theories have been translated into educational ideas. The various theories differ on the following point: *whether their own activities or social environments (teachers), or a combination of*

both, determine children's development.

The following distinctive theories have received acceptance: the maturation theory; constructivism; behaviourism; the Russian Theory and the Information processing theory.

Based on the foregoing, the following are the three most recent educational ideas concerning the education of young children:

*. The synthesis of *development-directed and programme-directed* education, also called preconditions for learning to think;
*. *Experienced-directed education* -The foundation of this idea is experience direction: teachers tune into the experiences of the children.
*. *Development-directed education and basic development* - Development-directed education assumes that children are capable of developing and being educated.

In practice, it appears that two-thirds of all elementary schools work with a combination of programme and development-directed education. In addition, there are so-called progressive schools. They operate from a pedagogic, educational or philosophical idea. Examples are the Montessori schools; the Free Schools, which operate according to the anthroposophic ideas of Steiner; the Jenaplan schools that follow the principles of Peter Petersen; the Dalton schools, based on the work of Helen Parkhurst; and the Freinet schools, which pay special attention to language and printed language.

1.3 Basic Legal Assumptions

1.3.1
Childcare

There are no formal legal regulations for the goals, contents or design of day nurseries or playgroups. Nor is it compulsory to take part in activities during the pre-school or out-of-school education. Attendance is voluntary.
Institutions offering activities in the area of upbringing support mainly fall under the Social Welfare Act. These include day nurseries, playgroups and the other (youth) welfare provisions.

Since January 1st 1996, the General Scheme for Administrative Quality Requirements for childcare is effectuated. These regulations enable institutions for child care and childminders which meet the quality requirements set, to receive a permit or statement from local authorities, attesting to the fact that they meet these requirements.

The starting point is that everything developed in the framework of the national quality system will serve as the basis for subsidies provided by local authorities. Afther a period of five years the General Scheme will expire. The local government will then investigate wether the regulatory function of the quality system is succesfull.

1.3.2
Primary education

In 1985, the Basic Education Act (WBO) went into effect. The starting age for basic education is four years (education legislation). Children must legally attend school starting at age five.
Primary school consists of a period of eight years. Starting at age four to and including age thirteen, pupils may attend primary school. Groups one, two and three make up the "infant department".

Section 8 of the WBO establishes the following basic assumptions and goals for primary education:

1. That the educational structure has an uninterrupted development process of pupils, adjusted to the progress in pupils' development.
2. That education is geared towards emotional and intellectual development and towards creative development, the acquisition of necessary knowledge and social, cultural and physical skills.
3. That pupils grow up in a multicultural society.

The same basic assumptions and goals, established in the WBO for mainstream primary education, apply to *special education*, which is regulated in the Interim Act for Special Education and Secondary Special Education (ISOVSO).

The Elementary Education Act

A new Primary Education Act (WPO) is drafted, which will replace the current Primary Education Act (WBO) and the Interim Act for Special (Secondary) Education. The WPO will incorporate legal provisions for primary and special education for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (LOM), children with moderate learning difficulties (MLK) and preschool children with development problems (IOBK). LOM, MLK and IOBK will be designated as special schools for primary education. This will provide a legal basis for the policy of Going to School Together (WSNS). WSNS provides a breakthrough in the separation between regular and special education (see "Going to School Together"). WPO take effect 1 August 1998.

In 1993 *core objectives* were established for both mainstream and special education. Schools must employ the core objectives at least in their educational activities and in the objectives to be attained at the end of primary education. The core objectives provide a description of pupils' qualities in the areas of knowledge, understanding and skills. At the end of primary education, pupils are not tested to see whether they have achieved the core objectives. Core objectives make requirements on what schools have to offer. The education inspectorate evaluates whether schools have brought the education they offer in line with the core objectives. The core objectives also help in designing lower school primary education.

The Education Inspectorate

Among the inspectorate's tasks is to see whether, in practice, schools comply with the intent of the law. The inspectorate's report, 'Proper Education for Young Children' (1992), defines standards and features for evaluating the education of children between the ages of four and eight years.

Chapter 2
The Structure of Childcare and Primary education

Introduction

This chapter discusses the structure of childcare and Primary education. Enclosures 1 and 2 give surveys of the number of pre-school provisions, attendance, schools and the number of teachers. There is also an overview of the costs per child/pupil. The chapter concludes by examining the state of affairs in detail.

2.1 Pre-School Provisions

In the Netherlands there are two main categories of childcare provision: day nurseries and playgroups. In addition, there are several family programmes aimed at family and childcare, the so-called Stappenprogramma (Step-by-Step Programme) project. Enclosure 1.1 provides a survey of the capacity data of childcare provision and of playgroups.

Pre-School Financial Provisions

Parents are asked to make contributions. For child childcare, there is (still) a national advisory table for parental contributions. Parental contributions depend on family income. Local authorities are free to set parental contributions. This also applies to playgroups.

Revenues

Since 1990 until 1996 the incentive policy for childcare has been in force. The principle of this policy was that local authorities received a fixed amount for each new fulltime place in childcare. The total amount of money was distributed among all municipalities according to certain criteria, such of number of inhabitants. As a result of the national incentive policy the total capacity in daycare has been substantially expanded (see enclosure 1). As of 1-1-1996 local authorities are responsible for the daycare policy. The consequence of the changed financing system of childcare is that a culture change in the institutions should be effected. The consequence of the changed financing of child childcare is that a cultural change in the institutions should be effected.

Playgroups do not receive subsidies from the Stimulus Scheme for Child Childcare.

They are not seen as 'child childcare'. Enclosure 1.2 contains a survey of childcare financing from 1989 to 1996.

2.2 Primary education

Capacity, Attendance and Funding

Enclosure 2 gives a survey of the number of pupils, schools, teachers and cost per pupil.

Funding of primary education has been regulated in the WBO, characterized by a large measure of autonomy for institutions. The government only establishes the conditions.
Primary education is free of charge. Schools may ask parents for a voluntary contribution to pay for the cost of extras, such as parties and excursions.

The ministry of Education, Culture and Science reimburses the competent school authorities for staff expenses, according to a budget system based on a fixed workforce. In addition, schools receive additional funds for expenses, such as replacement of staff during illness and formative friction. Schools can also receive supplementary formation for special activities such as projects, pupils who do not speak Dutch, pupils with educational arrears and for extraordinary increases in the number of pupils.

Schools will also receive reimbursement from the national government for the cost of material maintenance. With the aid of a system, schools receive budgets imputed to the competent school authorities, calculated using various indicators, based on standards for buildings, furniture, equipment and maintenance.

The national government reimburses local authorities for the cost of housing. Local authorities provide funds to pay for applications from school boards for housing special schools, in addition to housing provisions for public schools. The budget involved here will be decentralized to local authorities starting 1 January 1997.

2.3 The State of Affairs, Childcare and Primary education

2.3.1 Childcare

Learning and Education on Offer

People still view playgroups mainly as places to gain experience in social and development-directed areas. Children learn to deal with other children in a safe, challenging environment, with many toys and space, indoors and outdoors. In a sense, educational goals predominate. This does not necessarily pertain to the study skills needed but, in more general terms, to the social, cultural and emotional experience that children gain.

A Pedagogic, Didactic Approach

Generally, the typical working method of pedagogic education in most child centres places much emphasis on a sense of security and safety. Much attention therefore goes to meeting the conditions necessary to do so and to contacts between teachers and children.

Observing the children is part of the daily routine in most playgroups and childcare provision. Childcare workers base their pedagogic actions partly on their observations of individual children and the group.

The 'Step by step programme'

With this programme, the government greatly reduces the language and knowledge gaps of young children from ethnic minority groups. The aim is firstly to prevent educational disadvantage and prepare children for entry to Dutch primary schools, and subsequently to provide support for these children in the early years of primary school.

The 'Step by step programme'consists of vaious projects linked to specific age groups.

'Instapje' (0-2 years) gives parents an opportunity to become familiar with the (still limited) social environments of their children, using specific exercises and games.

'Opstapje' (2-4 years) is also a home programme for mothers to play and learn together with their children. Paraprofessional intermediairs, mothers from the same ethnic group, counsel these mothers. The children taking part also visit playgroups.

'Opstap' is an extramural programme for children between the ages of 4 and 6. The children's development is stimulated with the help of games, books and other activities. 'Overstap' (6 and 7 year olds) is specially aimed at children in the third group of primary education. Parents help their children by devoting extra time to reading at home. This method ties in with the most-frequently-used methods for learning to read at school. The 'Stap-Door' programme (Move On) was started in conjunction with the 'Overstap' programme. Older children (7 and 8 year olds) take part in the teaching process as mentors of younger children (group 4). Enclosure 1.3 provides an overview of participation in the 'Step by step programme'.

Collaborative experiments Childcare Education and Infant Department Education

In 1995 the ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the ministry of Welfare, Health and Science, opened in nine municipalities, eleven trial locations for early and pre-school education, for children from three to six years of age. Playgroups and primary schools work together using coordinated programmes. The locations can choose between the 'Kaleidoscope' programme, developed by the Averroés Foundation, or the 'Pyramid' programme, developed by the CITO/Van Kuyk. Both programmes are geared towards the initial language development in young children and the teaching of basic skills. The trial introduction will finish at the end of 1999. The final report will then be compiled.

2.3.2 Primary education

Although the state of affairs in primary education is qualitatively acceptable, there are several bottlenecks that need to be cleared up, considering the importance of this type of education. The introduction of the primary school in 1985 was a step in the direction of modern education. Two types of school have been integrated to form new-style primary schools catering for children from 4 to 12. This development will be continued and, where necessary, improved.
It is important that the primary school strives to provide pupils with a broad education, in accordance with the basic assumptions of the WBO. The education is set up in such a way that pupils can follow an uninterrupted process of development.
Section 4.2.2. presents several measures being taken in various policy routes to improve the education of young children.

Chapter 3
Education, In-service training and Counselling

3.1
Childcare

a. Day care centres

The qualifications required for employees in childcare provision and playgroups have been laid down in the Executive Rules for Salary Scaling in the collective labour agreement for Welfare Work. For childcare staff generally have to have an MBO[1] certificate in a branch of applied social studies. The study requirements for playgroup teachers are usually lower (three years of MBO studies, without a certificate, are acceptable). Much depends on the job responsibilities.

Directors' jobs are usually filled by people with HBO or university training in the areas of pedagogic or development psychology. Larger childcare centres more frequently employ directors with management backgrounds, without special qualifications in the fields of care and education. Consequently, they appoint deputy directors or seek advice from consultants.

b. Playgroups

As in the case of child day-care centres, the training of teachers in playgroups can vary widely (LBO to university). The term 'experience' is used in a wider sense. There are professional profiles that apply to playgroup teachers in club and community centres. They are part of the Socio-Cultural Work collective labour agreement. Besides working with professionals, programmes such as Opstapje and Opstap also work with people from the target group, who work under supervision to reach the target group. Such community-centre mothers are referred to as para-professionals. The playgroups are to a large extent dependent on the help of many volunteers.

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[1] See list of abbreviations, enclosure 4.

c. 'Step by Step' programmes

In programmes such as 'Opstapje' and 'Opstap' besides the professionals many paraprofessionals are also employed. Paraprofessionals are women from the target groups who work under supervision of the professionals to bridge the gap to the target group. The 'Overstap-programme' is executed by the schoolteacher.

3.2

Teacher Training, Primary education

a. Primary Education

Since the introduction of the WBO in 1985, nursery school and primary education has merged, jointly forming the new Pedagogic Academy of Primary Education (PABO). In total, there are forty 'hogescholen'/PABOs offering teacher training for primary education.

The PABO must train teachers for versatile employment. It has recently become possible to take the specialisation 'Young Children', as a one-year component of the four-year study programme.

b. Special Education

Special Education teacher training is a two-year study programme, consisting of several modules that students can take after completing the PABO study programme. Among others, the study programme offers teaching routes for problem children, children with mental disabilities, with learning and behavioural difficulties, auditory impediments or pre-school age children with development difficulties etc.

Besides the aforementioned tasks, the teacher's role in special education includes providing peripatetic counselling in primary schools.

c. In-service training on Offer, 'Education for Young Children'

During the course of pre-schooling, there are various in-service training provision. The courses on offer are fragmentary. They can relate to various problems with respect to young children.

In addition to offering the initial education, there are also specific 'education for

young children' in-service training developed for primary education teachers. These courses are partially directed by OCenW through national programming of National Educational Advisory Centres. They involve courses that tie in with the various educational ideas and visions relating to young children. Besides these courses directed at specific educational concepts, there are also in-service training relating to young children, which focus on specific problems. Examples are language learning, functional literacy, reading drop-outs, pre-school age children with development difficulties issues, arithmetic and mathematic education.

d. Provision of educational support

Schools, school counselling services, national educational care institutions and study programmes have initiated programmes from different points of view. These include the expansion or exchange of knowledge, the development of didactics and materials, focusing on young children during teacher training programmes and teacher training. However, these activities have not had a wide effect on educational practice and school policy.

Chapter 4

The relationship and coordination of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport policies; bottlenecks and policy measures.

4.1.1.
Local Education Policy

Both the schools and the municipalities must prevent pupils leaving school early. In any case, young people should attain basic qualifications for the labour market. Combating early-school leaving requires coherence and cooperation, not only inside education but especially with other bodies such as school advisory services, welfare institutions, RIAGG (mental health services), general social work, youth health care, youth assistance, the law, the police, job centres and social services. With this kind of integral approach, the school becomes a neighbourhood centre. The municipality can best judge local needs and is in an ideal position to take the lead in such matters.

The memorandum entitled "Local Education Policy" outlines the governing role of the municipality. The memorandum lays the basis for the developing of municipalities' own education policy, alongside traditional administrative tasks. This does not merely involve new government tasks. It also deals with the shifting of competencies from national to local government. As a result, the government can fulfil its tasks more effectively. It will enhance the possibilities of attuning local, customised work between schools and municipalities. This concerns school counselling, Dutch as a second language, educational priority policy, housing, municipal education disadvantages and education in modern, migrant languages.

In practice, some municipalities have already taken worthy initiatives, in which the school has become a neighbourhood centre, with many provisions for young people (examples: the Brede School in Rotterdam, the Vensterschool in Groningen and the Kantoortijdenschool in Haarlem).

4.1.2.
Compensatory Policy

An individual approach and dealing with differences will make it possible to combat educational disadvantages. Schools, municipalities and the national government are each involved in their own ways in combating educational disadvantages. The approach to doing so, however, will be more successful if there is cohesion and attunement. The problems facing pupils and schools are often so complex that school counselling in itself is insufficient. Coordination at local level is extremely important in bringing about such a coherent approach.

The Municipal Education Compensatory Policy Act gives municipalities a governing role in combating educational disadvantages. One important instrument in the local approach is the municipal education compensatory plan. Based on an analysis of local educational problems, the town councils compile such plans once every four years. Prior to this, there should be consultation with schools about the contents of the plans and how the money is to be spent. The municipalities receive money to combat disadvantages. However, part of the money goes to the schools ("The Weighting Money"). This part must be spent in accordance with commitments in the educational compensatory plan. The law encompasses the following fields: combating disadvantages (weighting scheme, educational priority policy and preschool period) and Dutch as a second language. There is a clear intention here to incorporate education compensatory policy in youth health care, social work and other areas of preventive youth care, for example.

The municipalities must establish their first educational compensatory plans by 1 August 1998.

4.1.3.
Coordination of Childcare education / Link to infant department primary education

The aim of preventive youth policy is to promote the chances of the young and to prevent youthful drop-outs, wherever possible. As stated, local authorities have the primary responsibility here. There must be better coordination among fields such as child childcare, youth health care, education, sport and afther-school activities. 'Local Educational Policy' provides good starting points for local authorities for

coordinating educational policy and preventive youth policy, locally.

Following on the cabinet's response, 'Towards more Success at School', the OCenW and VWS wrote a joint executive memorandum about the link between the childcare provision period and the infant department period of het primary school. The tenor of this memorandum, from the viewpoint of OCenW is to bring about an improvement of equipment in infant department. From VWS's standpoint, it is to improve childcare. To achieve this, OCenW and VWS carry out joint activities.

Since 1995, both ministries have made extra funds available to set up several experiments concerning 'Early and Pre-School Education'. Meanwhile, two programmes are being tested at eleven locations, comprised of various playgroups and lower-school groups in primary education. *(1. 'Kaleidoscope', developed by Averroés, or 2. 'Pyramid', developed by the National Institute for Educational Measurement).* With the help of financial incentives, the locations selected can improve the link between pre-school and primary education, locally.

Other Educational Priority Activities Pre-School/Early-School Period
Besides the above activities, which the ministry of OCenW leads directly, there are other activities within the framework of Educational Priority Policy designed to reduce or prevent educational arrears on the part of arrearchildren. The nature of these activities depends on the priorities of the Educational Priority Area. Some areas receive supplementary VWS funds (for example, in the framework of the 'Opstap', 'Opstapje', 'Instapje' and 'Overstap' projects). Besides these VWS activities, activities such as language-promotion and reading-improvement projects are carried out with the extra Educational Priority Policy-funds.

An Educational Priority study in 1994 showed that participation of arrearchildren in childcare provisions and language-promotion at home had a positive connection to these children's language performance in primary school. Ethnic minority children visit the childcare provisions less than indigenous children. Noteworthy here is the fact that, of the ethnic minority children, Turkish and Moroccan children profit most from the positive effect on language performance of childcare.

4.2 Bottlenecks and Policy Measures

4.2.1 Childcare

At present, splits and divisions are the bottlenecks in the education on offer from the various sectors. Cooperation among institutions is often laborious. The current policy for educational disadvantage is not sufficiently effective. Therefore a decentralisation of the educational disadvantage policy has been agreed upon. Within the framework of local Education policy it is possible to achieve a better attunement of education policy and preventive youth policy and to align supply and demand better. Encouraging contributions from young people themselves receives special attention here.

4.2.2

Bottlenecks in Primary education

Some pupils who enter the primary school have already educational disadvantages. Therefore the policy aims to combat these disadvantages in the pre-school phase. In experimental situations cooperation between day nurseries and primary schools is being tried out.

Measures of defines policy:

a. Going to School Together Project (WSNS)

The aim of Going to School Together is to promote the integration of pupils requiring special care. The main starting point here is bringing the care to the pupil, instead of bringing the pupil to the care - to provide made-to-measure care for pupils who need it. Within this framework, partial integration of special education with primary education is desirable, to break down the system barriers between both types of schools. This requires the merging of existing legislation and rules (WBO - ISOVSO). This would integrate LOM and MLK types of schools and departments of IOBK education with primary education within a single legal framework, the Primary Education Act (WPO). The WPO will go into effect 1 August 1998.

Teachers' Aids Infant Department

Paying attention to young children, in an effort to reduce the problems associated with the infant department, is a policy priority of this cabinet. Children's problems usually start in the infant department. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the

infant department to avoid drop-outs. By using teachers' aids in a collaborative relationship, Going to School Together, schools can offer specific extra instruction and exercises to pupils with special needs, during the infant department period. The cost of using teachers' aids is around NLG 100 million. It is financed separately.

b. Pupil-related Funding for Special Education

Parents of children with disabilities increasingly opt for regular education. Parents prefer to see their children growing up in familiar environments with their peers, attending school close to home, instead of going to a boarding school. Current funding rules are not well attuned to this. The policy plan "the Rucksack" proposes a different type of funding, which would provide for disabled pupils "taking along" available care facilities to regular schools (pupil-related funding). The idea behind this is that people with disabilities should be able to lead normal lives, wherever possible. Following extensive consultation with the parents, teachers and education experts concerned, it was clear that there was broad support for the ideas.

Pupil-related funding is designed for pupils that require supplementary provisions as a result of their disabilities. This involves pupils with sensory, mental or physical disabilities.

In future, parents of disabled children can choose between education at regular or special schools. This freedom of choice has a basis in law. Children that require special provisions because of disabilities qualify for pupil-related budgets. Parents may spend that budget on either special or regular education. In a sense, the pupils carry their right to special provisions along with them in their rucksacks. Independent indication committees evaluate whether pupils are eligible for pupil-related funding. In addition, the Compulsory Education Act will be more strictly enforced on children with (mental) disabilities, which permanently establishes educational legislation for this group. Clustering of schools and types of schools will ensure the continuance of expertise and dispersal of care for pupils.

The aim is to introduce pupil-related funding in primary and secondary education, starting 1 August 1999.

c. Reduction in Size of Classes

A major development in Dutch government policy for primary education is a reduction in group sizes. Compared to other countries, classes in Dutch primary schools are very large. On average, there are twenty-five children per group. In 1997, the first step was taken to reduce the number of pupils per class. Because of the high cost, it was decided to gear extra investments entirely to benefit the youngest children (four to seven year olds). This would enable groups to be reduced to twenty-three children. Following the elections in May 1998, the aim is to clarify policy regarding a further reduction in group sizes.

d. Quality Improvement

Simultaneously, measures are being taken to improve the quality of education, particularly that of young children. There has never been a national curriculum in the Netherlands for primary education. Recently, several general objectives were formulated, for which schools have to make allowance in their own teaching programmes.

The new policy initiatives are designed to clarify the type of education that primary schools must give. In the first instance, education experts are developing "interim goals" for the Dutch language, arithmetic or mathematics. Other subjects may follow later. The interim goals will contain didactic recommendations, to enable teachers to interpret the goals more easily. A new programme for in-service training and school counselling will be developed to introduce these new curriculum recommendations. In addition, in future teachers will be required to record the progress of pupils systematically in a "pupil monitoring system". The expectation is that systematic monitoring of progress will provide a better basis for differentiation in teaching.

Quality care will get an impulse at school level. Schools should systematically monitor and, where necessary, improve quality. They should be accountable in this regard to the Inspectorate and to the parents. The school prospectus outlines for parents the main school goals, activities and results. The prospectus can assist parents in choosing schools that meet their educational ideals. It can also enable parents to enter into discussions with schools about school policy. Participation councils provide a formal framework for parents and teachers to hold discussions

with school boards about school policy. Parents and teachers have significant competencies in determining school policies. For major decisions, school boards require the approval of the participation councils.

e. Dutch language Expertise Centre

The aim of the Dutch language Expertise Centre is to improve or renew language-teaching methods, including the language-teaching methods for groups one and two. Additionally, there must be improvement in training, in-service training and counselling of teachers, including training and counselling of teachers for or in the lower school. The Netherlands Expertise centre must tackle the following concerns:

1. Language arrears of young (ethnic minority) pupils, which is not being made up;
2. Language as a basis for referral to special education (particularly in group three).

f. Teacher training

Teacher training will be more in line with school practice, for example, by introducing specializations for younger and older children; by strengthening attention for made-to-measure education; and a gradual transition from training to practice, through the job of teachers in training. Also, the development of professional profiles and related capability requirements of teacher training offer a foothold for improving their training programmes.

g. Information and Communications Technology

Social developments necessitate investments in information and communication technology (ICT) in education. To prepare pupils properly for the labour market, ICT should be part of the course programme. Moreover, ICT can improve pupils' achievements. It affords an opportunity for learning at one's own rate of speed and for self-motivation. ITC makes it easier to anticipate the wants and needs of pupils. It opens avenues to dealing with differences. Teachers counsel pupils. Their roles as purveyors of information are reduced. ICT can contribute to internationalizing education and to distance learning.

The action plan "Investing in a Head Start" describes how ICT will be integrated into education. That holds true for primary and secondary education, vocational

education and teacher training. For the first step during the 1997/1998 school year, the cabinet has set aside 272 million Dutch guilders. Schools and training courses will be provided with advanced computers, software and networks. Teaching staff will receive instruction and in-service training. Ultimately, there will be one computer for each ten pupils in school and one computer per three students in teacher training.

There is an incentive plan for developing method-related software to support language and arithmetic in infant department primary education, along with promoting remediation, differentiation and prevention. The selection of existing methods or those under development, which will receive software support, will be based on advice from the Proces Management Primary Education.

h . The Position of Parents

It is important that parents and schools work together. Both are busy raising children. Cooperation between schools and parents results in a more pleasant school atmosphere and better results of the pupils. Parents need to be well informed if they are to exercise a certain amount of influence. After all, it concerns their children. That is why the position of parents has been strengthened under the present government.

Some examples are; the influence that parents have on voluntary parental contributions; sponsoring); greater freedom of parental choice in selecting schools for disabled children (see "Pupil-related Funding for Special Education"); and the introduction of the school prospectus (which keeps parents informed on the operation of schools. In terms of public information, too, various things have been set in motion. "Together, we can make school work" is the title of a public information campaign designed to help schools get unskilled, migrant parents involved in the schooling and education of their children. For such groups, active involvement in schools is not a matter of course. The education charter is a publication of the Ministry, which informs parents and pupils about their rights and obligations with respect to school. There is an education charter for primary education and one for secondary education.

Enclosure 1. Childcare Provision 1996

Capacity data

Day nurseries, half day nurseries 1989 - 1995

	1989	1994	1996
municipalities with childcare provinsion	32%	84%	88%
number of provisions	900	2.200	2.300
total capacity	20.400	68.000	75.500
places rented to businesses % of total capacity	2.700 13%	24.000 35%	32.500 43%
number of children	56.000	115.000	140.000
number of jobs (fulltime)	3.000	11.000	13.000

Playgroups (2-4 years)

	1995
number of provisions	4.000
total capacity	90.000
number of children (most children visit on parttime basis)	200.000
paid employees	8.000
volunteers	13.300
trainees	2.100

2. Survey of Childcare Financing, 1989 - 1996 (playgroups excluded)
price per (fulltime place) 1996 NLG 18.000 (maximum)

financing sources (x 1 thousand million)

	1989	1994	1996
government	160 (55%)	383 (41%)	350 (33%)
parents	103 (35%)	345 (37%)	446 (42%)
employers	20 (7%)	172 (19%)	263 (25%)
funds	10 (3%)	25 (3%)	p.m.

3. Participation in the 'Step by step programme' 1996 - 1997:

Total municipalities 1-1-1997: 572
Total schools primary education (1-10-1997): 8.201

Pre-school

	children	municipalities
Instapje (0-2 years)	83	4
Opstapje (2-4 years)	2.165	49
Opstap (4-6 years)	6.459	74

Primary School

	children	municipalities	schools
Overstap (6-7 years)	13.000	68	364

'Stap Door' (7-8 years):
Trial introducion at 158 schools, in various municipalties, started in 1996.

Enclosure 2.

Survey of the number of pupils, schools, personnel and government expenditures per pupil, Primary education

PUPILS

Pupils per 1-10-1997, bij denomination

	Municipal		Roman Catholic		Protestant		Other		Total
	number	%	number	%	number	%	numbe r	%	number=100 %
primary educ.	483.636	31.8%	498.989	32.8%	410.835	27.0%	126.337	8.3%	1.519.797
Special primary and secondary education	31.822	26.5%	37.230	30.7%	25.062	20.7%	27.181	22.4%	121.295

SCHOOLS

Schools per 1-10-1997, by denomination

	Municipal		Roman Catholic		Protestant		Other		Total
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	number = 100%
Primary education	2.426	33.5	2.120	29.3	2.126	29.4	564	7.8	7.236
Special primary and secondary education	262	27.2	283	29.3	209	21.7	211	21.9	965

PERSONNEL

teaching staff, numbers by gender, per 1-10-1995 (x NLG 1,000)

	Men	Women	Total
(special) primary and secondary education	36,3	73,6	109,9

teaching staff in full-time employment, paid for by the national government per 1-10-1997 (x 1,000)

Primary education	71,1
Secondary special	14,0

EXPENDITURES

national government expenditures per pupil (x NLG 1,000)

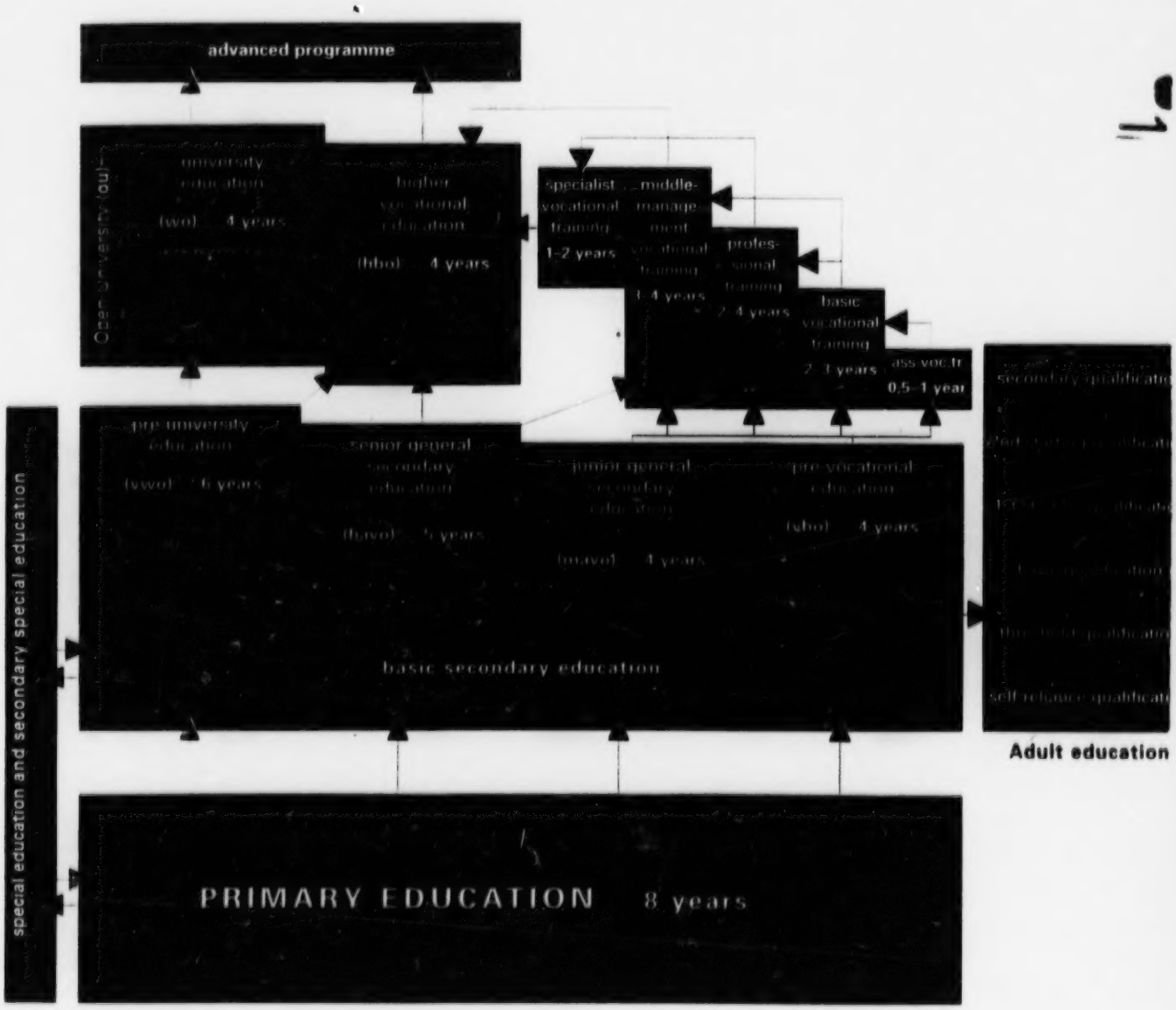
	1995	1996	1997
Primary education	5,1	5,2	5,2
Special primary and secondary education	15,0	15,6	15,8

total national government expenditures (x 1 thousand million)

	1995	1996	1997
regular	7,5	7,7	7,8
Secondary special	1,8	1,9	1,9
Primary education	9,3	9,6	9,7

Structure of the Dutch education system

The diagram below shows how primary education fits into the Dutch education system



Vwo, havo, mavo and vbo are types of secondary education

Hbo, university education and the Open University (OU) are part of higher education

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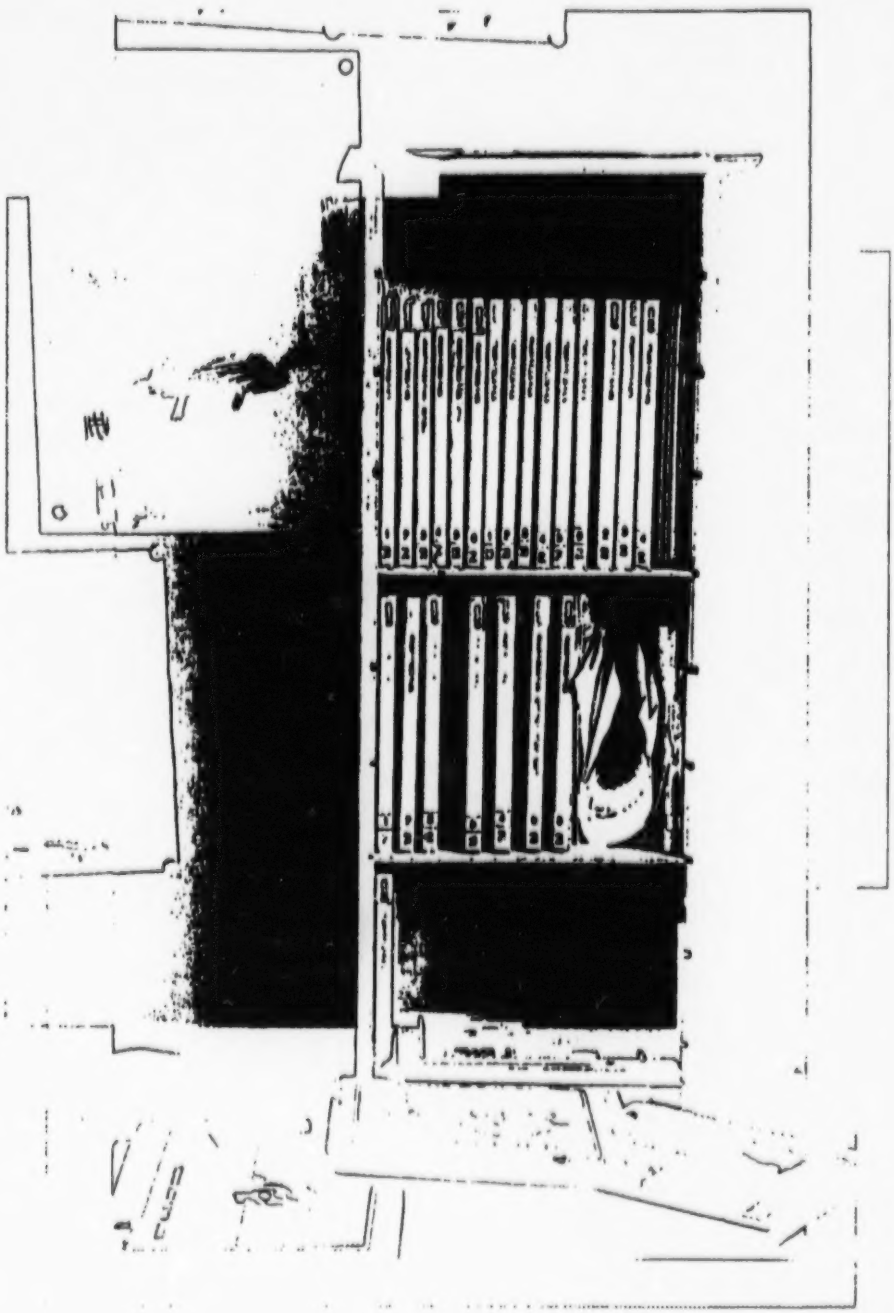

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Enclosure 4.

List of Explanations/Abbreviations:

OCenW	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
VWS	Ministry of Health, Welfare and Science
PO	Primary education (primary and special education)
SO	Special education
Basisonderwijs	Primary education
(V)SO	Special education and secondary special education
PMPO	Process Management Primary Education
APS	Non-denominational Educational Advisory Centre
KPC	Catholic Educational Advisory centre
CPS	Protestant Educational Advisory Centre
CITO	National Institute for Educational Measurement
SLO	Institute for Educational Research in the Netherlands
WBO	Primary Education Act
ISOVSO	Special Education Interim Act
IOBK	Pre-school age children with developmental difficulties
LOM	Education for children with learning and behavioural difficulties
MLK	Education for children with learning difficulties
WPO	Elementary Education Act
PABO	Primary Elementary Teacher Training College
LBO	Junior secondary vocational education
MBO	Senior secondary vocational education
HBO	Higher vocational education

List of institutions

CITO	National Institute for Educational Measurement
SLO	National Institute for Curriculum Development
APS	Education Advisory Centre
CPS	Protestant Educational Advisory Centre
KPC	Catholic Educational Advisory Centre
Stichting Averroés	Averroès European Centre for Early Child Development and the Familiy in association with UNESCO

Publicatie van het
Ministerie van Onderwijs,
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Ministerie van Volksgezondheid,
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